



FROM THE SPECIAL ISSUE EDITOR

Welcome to the LLT Special Issue on Distance Learning. I am pleased to introduce this special issue which focuses on the important and timely topic of distance language learning.

Few topics have received more discussion and attention recently among educators, administrators, and funding agencies than distance learning. At a time when technology is developing at a rapid pace, educators are struggling with the best ways to integrate technology into the learning experience. Distance learning has been impacted tremendously by recent developments in computer and Internet technology. Rapid technological development of media such as interactive Web pages, live chats, MOOs, and discussion boards, have transformed distance learning into a unique mode of instruction with its own emerging methodology.

As a result of this tremendous influx of technological resources, researchers, administrators, and instructors are struggling with how to make the best use of the plethora of choices available to them for the delivery of distance education. For language teachers, this has been an especially challenging struggle given the special needs of language learners.

In the first article in this special issue, "[Optimal Psycholinguistic Environments for Distance Foreign Language Learning](#)," Doughty and Long directly address the problem of identifying the best uses of technology for the distance learner of language. The authors point out that all language instruction, distance or otherwise, needs to provide an environment that best facilitates the acquisition of language based on what has been learned from SLA research. What we know about how language is learned and how language learning can best be supported in the classroom should be a guiding force in our decisions regarding how to choose the best technological options for an optimal learning environment.

In the second article, "[Flexibility and Interaction at a Distance: A Mixed-Mode Environment for Language Learning](#)," Strambi and Bouvet discuss the development and implementation of two beginning-level university language courses in French and Italian. Using the psycholinguistic, affective, and logistical needs of distance learners as guiding principles, course developers sought to create a distance course that best supports language learning. Using a CD-ROM for interactive course materials as well as the course management and communication tools available through WebCT, the course developers designed a course that sought to better address the needs of the learners than the previous, low-tech, version of the courses. Despite problems with WebCT that prevented the course instructors from making use of this component of the course, students reported positive attitudes about their experiences in the distance course. While the psycholinguistic impact of this course was not investigated in terms of language proficiency gains, the positive attitudes expressed by the students indicate that their affective and logistical challenges were addressed with the design and implementation of the courses.

In the next article, "[Meeting the Needs of Distance Learners](#)," Sampson explores the specific needs and attitudes of multinational and multilingual students enrolled in a Masters of Education hybrid distance learning program. The students were situated in Hong Kong and participated in courses offered by a British University. In addition to



their distance learning and self study of the material, students participated in face-to-face seminars at their home site of Hong Kong, used local resources, and were assigned a local tutor with whom they interacted about their progress. An attitude survey showed that the participants were satisfied with the course content, the feedback they received on their assignments, and the time allotted for assignment completion. Students were much less satisfied with the coordination and degree of support offered locally. Of particular concern was the highly variable degree of usefulness of the local tutors. Sampson provides several suggestions for ways to improve the course, focusing on how administrative changes as well as increased attention to communication can better meet student needs in such a distance course.

In their article, "[Online Learning: Patterns of Engagement and Interaction Among In-Service Teachers](#)," Pawan, Paulus, Yalcin, and Chang analyzed the online discourse of participants in three different online professional development courses. The authors found that the majority of the postings to the online discussions consisted of one-way monologues largely limited to information sharing rather than integration of ideas. The authors identify possible future pedagogical interventions that could help increase the total number of two-way, interactive postings and raise the level of collaborative interaction.

In her article "[Using Native Speakers in Chat](#)," Tudini explores the potential for unstructured, unsupervised chat with native speakers (NSs) to promote negotiation of meaning and modification of learner interlanguage by examining the transcripts of chats between intermediate learners of Italian and their NS chat partners. Tudini found that in this open-ended conversation environment, learners engaged in negotiation of meaning with their NS interlocutors, though to a lesser degree than reported in previous studies. The study also examined the differential contribution of triggers for negotiation of meaning.

In addition to the five articles in this Special Issue, the regular columns describe new technologies, resources, and materials for distance learning. In the "[On the Net](#)" column, LeLoup and Ponteiro profile several Internet-based interactive language grammar and pronunciation activities for Spanish, French, German, Italian, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Latin language learners. In the Column "[Emerging Technologies](#)," Godwin-Jones takes readers on a tour of the various technological options for distance learning by profiling current choices in Learner Management Systems (LMS), both the traditional (*WebCT*, *Blackboard*) and other options (*Etudes*, *Manila*). For those who are interested in a custom developed course or adding custom features to an LMS course, options for content, animation, and Web page development as well as audio/video and synchronizing tools are discussed and illustrated.

I would like to add a final word of thanks to Associate Editor Irene Thompson, Managing Editor Pam DaGrossa, and Web Production Editor Carol Wilson-Duffy for their help, advice, and hard work putting this issue together. Additionally, we wish to thank the authors and reviewers for their contributions to this Special Issue. We hope that our readers will find the articles in this Special Issue interesting, timely, and informative, and that they will be stimulated to conduct their own research in this emerging area of language education.

Sincerely,

Margo Glew, Special Issue Editor

